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AUTHOR Rammuny, Raji M.
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ABSTRACT

The Arabic Proficiency Test (APT), developed in 1991-92, is described and details of its scoring are outlined. The APT is designed to measure general proficiency in literary Arabic in reading and writing, and in listening and production of standard spoken Arabic. Its proficiency rating scale corresponds to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' proficiency guidelines. The test consists of three booklets (listening/reading comprehension, writing, and speaking) and is available in two forms. The listening and reading comprehension test contains multiple choice items on a variety of recorded and printed texts. The writing section consists of tasks ranging from writing out short notes and filling out simple forms to letter-writing and original composition. Spelling, punctuation, length, appropriate vocabulary and grammar usage, clarity, organization, and coherence are measured. The speaking test requires oral responses appropriate to specific speaking tasks. Field testing involved a total of 144 examinees. Scoring of the reading/listening comprehension test is done manually with scoring key sheets, and involves assigning numerical scores according to specific guidelines, which are provided here. Scoring tables for school placement purposes are also provided. Plans for establishment of national norms are described, and instruction for ordering tests are included. (MSE)

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REPORT ON
THE NEW ARABIC PROFICIENCY TEST

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Submitted to:

Mr. Jose Martinez
U.S. Department of Education
Division of Student Services
Room 3060, Rob-3
400 Maryland Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202-5249

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Submitted by:

Raji M. Rammuny
Department of Near Eastern Studies
University of Michigan
3078 Frieze Building
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1285

March 9, 1992

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GENERAL INFORMATION

A. Introduction

The Arabic Proficiency Test (APT) is mainly designed to measure general proficiency of examinees in literary Arabic in reading and writing and in spoken standard Arabic in listening and speaking. It is intended for examinees at proficiency levels from Novice High to Superior according to the ACTFL Arabic Proficiency Guidelines which were prepared by a team of professors of Arabic, on the basis of the generic 1986 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, and published in *Foreign Language Annals* 22/4, 1989 (pp. 373-392).

The APT was developed in 1991-92, through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, by Professor Raji M. Rammuny (project director) in collaboration with Professor Mahmoud E. Seiny of King Saᶜud University. A Working Team consisting of Dr. John Clark (Defense Language Institute), Professor Ernest N. McCarus (University of Michigan), Dr. Charles W. Stansfield and Mr. Dorry Kenyon (Center for Applied Linguistics) participated in the planning of the project, reviewed draft test materials and provided expert consultation throughout the development of the test. Mr. Eric Thurston, a graduate research assistant, helped in many ways including typing and formatting the test materials, and Ms. Widad T. Shalabi assisted in typing the Arabic passages.

B. Test Content

The APT consists of three test booklets: Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension, Writing, and Speaking. The test is available in two forms, Form A and Form B. Total administration time is 3 hours and 35 minutes. One hour and 50 minutes are to be allotted for the Listening and Reading Comprehension Section, one hour for writing, and about 47 minutes for speaking. Additional time for administrative instructions and for the examinee to fill out the background questionnaire is to be provided beyond the testing time.

Each examinee is provided with a packet of materials which contains the test booklet with general instructions on the first page, two machine-scorable answer sheets including background questionnaire, and a blank tape on which examinee responses are recorded during the administration of the Speaking Section.

1. Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension

This test is designed to evaluate the examinees' ability to understand spoken and written standard Arabic. The test consists of two sections, Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension.

The Listening Comprehension section includes greetings, simple utterances, conversations, radio and TV announcements, short descriptions and narratives, and other types of passages of increasing difficulty, such as proverbs, jokes and poetry readings. All spoken passages have been selected from live recordings of radio and TV programs, lectures, discussions, and brief exchanges of educated spoken Arabic. These selections have been copied on a tape which will be played to the examinees at the time of testing.

In the Reading Comprehension section, the examinees will read and answer questions about a variety of types of written Arabic materials, ranging in length from short texts, such as signs and messages, to long passages that deal with abstract topics. All of the texts in this section are authentic. In retyping them, in order to avoid unclear items that may result from photocopying, we have tried our best to preserve their original format and appearance.

Each of the two sections of the test is composed of 50 multiple choice items, followed by one or more questions and four options printed in the test booklet in English. The final score will be based on the number of questions the examinees answer correctly. If the examinees are not sure of an answer, they should make the best judgment possible based on whatever information they are able to get from the passage. They are instructed not to leave any questions blank.

When marking their answers, the examinees should use a pencil in order to make it easy for them to change their answer if they wish. If they change an answer, they should be sure to erase their first answer completely. The examinees are instructed not to write anything in the test booklet and to mark all answers on the separate answer sheet provided.

The Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension sections are each divided into three parts. Special instructions are given at the beginning of each part.

2. Writing

The Arabic Writing Proficiency Test is intended to measure the

examinees' ability to produce written Literary Arabic. The tasks they will be asked to perform range from writing short notes and messages and filling out simple forms with basic information, to more challenging tasks involving writing a letter and an original composition. Their writing will be evaluated with regard to spelling, punctuation, adequate length, appropriate use of vocabulary and grammar, as well as clarity, organization, and coherence.

In order to finish this entire test, it is suggested that the examinees work as quickly as possible and not spend too much time on any one item. If they finish the test before the time is called, they may use the remaining time to review any of the questions in the test.

The Writing test will take approximately 60 minutes.

3. Speaking

This test is intended to evaluate the examinees' ability to speak Arabic fluently and accurately. It consists of six parts. Directions will be given in English, both in the test booklet and on the tape. The examinees are instructed to listen carefully to the instructions as they are read aloud and to record their responses in Arabic when asked to do so. They are requested to say as much as they can and to speak clearly and loudly enough to have their responses properly recorded.

During the test the examinees will be asked to put themselves into various contexts in the Arab world. Rather than trying to accommodate their Arabic to the geographic dialects of the different Arab countries, the examinees are instructed to use a "standard" type of Arabic acceptable to educated speakers of the Arabic language.

Within each part of the test, the speaking tasks the examinees will be asked to perform will range in difficulty from easy to considerably more challenging. They are not expected to be able to answer all questions with equal facility. However, they should try to speak as much and as well as possible in response to each question.

The amount of time provided for each response will vary depending on the complexity of the question or situation. The examinees are free to stop talking when they feel they have given a complete response. On the other hand, they should not worry if they are occasionally interrupted by the next question before completing their answer. A short beep signal will indicate that they have three seconds to bring their responses to an appropriate close before the next question begins. Two times are indicated in parentheses at the end of each item. The

first time is the amount of time they will have to think about each question. When that time is up, they will hear a question or statement in Arabic, and they may then begin to speak. They are instructed not to speak until they hear the question or statement. The second time in the parentheses indicates the amount of time they will have to respond to the question.

The speaking test will take approximately 45 minutes.

C. Uses of the APT

The new APT, as originally planned, is intended to provide data on the examinees' general proficiency in literary Arabic in reading and writing and in spoken standard Arabic in listening and speaking. Such a rating may be useful for a variety of purposes, such as:

1. admission to an Arabic study program
2. placement in the appropriate Arabic class level
3. fulfillment of the Arabic language requirement
4. selection of examinees for scholarship or appointment
5. competency testing upon exit from an Arabic program
6. measurement of students' progress during their academic or summer study
7. certification of Arabic language proficiency for occupational purposes
8. evaluation of an Arabic instructional program

D. Field Testing of the APT

After all items for the two forms of the APT were developed, draft versions of the forms were carefully reviewed by members of the working committee. Suggested revisions were incorporated into the forms. During the summer of 1991, Form A was field tested on 59 examinees from various levels. Form B was field tested on 86 examinees in the fall of 1991. Examinees participating in the field testing also completed a questionnaire eliciting their personal evaluations of the test and their suggestions for improvement. After the results of the field testing were statistically analyzed and the questionnaire responses read,

tallied, and summarized, the two test forms were further revised using the information collected from the field testing. These revised forms were again carefully reviewed by members of the working committee before the final versions of the test forms were printed.

SCORING OF THE TEST

A. Listening and Reading Comprehension

Scoring of the 50 multiple choice items in the Listening Comprehension section and the 50 items in the Reading Comprehension section is done (temporarily) manually by using the two scoring keys which fit over the Answer Sheets. The keys are punched to reveal only the correct responses for the two sections. After norms of proficiency for the Listening and Reading Comprehension tests are determined by the Center of Applied Linguistics' staff in the near future, each examinee's score on these two tests will be calculated accurately using machine scanning of the answer sheets.

B. Writing

The writing section consists of three parts for a total of 100 points. The scoring of this section has to be done according to the guidelines below. The actual score given to this test is 50; therefore the total points earned by the examinee should be divided by 2.

Part One: Simple Tasks

Task 1. Five (5) points are given for this portion. Subtract half (1/2) a point for each missing word and one fourth (1/4) of a point for each misspelled word.

Task 2. Five (5) points are given for this portion. Subtract half (1/2) a point for each missing word and one fourth (1/4) of a point for each misspelled word.

Task 3. Five (5) points are given for this portion to be distributed as follows:

0 points: no response.

1 point: contains very little information; severe and persistent errors in vocabulary usage and spelling.

2 points: contains only fragmented and often inaccurate information; many errors in vocabulary usage and spelling; lack of control of the very few vocabulary items and expressions used in filling this form.

3 points: contains insufficient information; occasional errors in vocabulary usage and spelling; partial knowledge and control of the terminology used in filling out application forms.

4 points: contains satisfactory and adequate information; few errors in vocabulary usage and spelling; demonstrates knowledge of filling out an application.

5 points: contains relevant information; displays competence in filling out an application using appropriate words and expressions; minor vocabulary errors.

Tasks 4 and 5: Five (5) points are given for each of these tasks to be distributed as follows:

0 points: no response.

1 point: communicates almost nothing; contains constant writing errors.

2 points: contains only fragmented and often inaccurate information; shows lack of control of the very few vocabulary items and syntactic expressions used; unfamiliarity with the appropriate terms needed for the situation.

3 points: contains insufficient information; occasional errors in the use of vocabulary and structures; demonstrates partial knowledge and control of the appropriate terminology needed for each situation.

4 points: contains satisfactory and adequate information; few errors in vocabulary usage, spelling and syntax; demonstrates good grasp of the terminology used in each situation.

5 points: contains complete information; displays familiarity with and control of the terminology used in each situation; only minor vocabulary and structural problems.

Part Two: Writing a formal letter

1. Forty (40) points are given for writing the letter. Following is a suggested distribution of the points.

5 points: extremely short -- about 15 words or less; communicates almost nothing; contains serious and persistent writing errors.

10 points: short -- about 20 words; narrow and simple vocabulary and syntactic structures; constant errors in syntax, vocabulary usage and spelling; lacks organization and coherence.

15 points: contains incomplete information regarding mechanics of writing an Arabic letter (i.e., date, opening and closing greetings, signature) and its main content; simple syntactic structures and vocabulary are present, but with many errors; little sign of organization and development.

20 points: contains satisfactory but inadequate information regarding mechanics of writing an Arabic letter and its main content; occasional errors in syntax, vocabulary usage, spelling, and punctuation; organization and development are poorly controlled.

25 points: contains satisfactory information regarding writing Arabic formal letters; both simple and complex syntactic structures are still present; vocabulary is sometimes inadequate and inappropriately used; organization and development are partially controlled.

30 points: contains adequate information regarding mechanics of writing an Arabic letter and its main content; few errors in syntax, vocabulary usage, spelling and punctuation; generally organized and coherent.

35 points: displays both knowledge and control of writing Arabic letters; varied syntactic structures are used with flexibility; vocabulary use is generally adequate and appropriate; there are few spelling and punctuation errors, but they are not distracting; organization and development of the letter are generally controlled.

40 points: displays complete knowledge and effective control of writing Arabic letters; almost full control of and facility with the use of syntactic structures, choice of words and word forms, spelling, and punctuation; clearly written, well organized, and well developed.

Part Three: Writing on a selected topic

Thirty-five (35) points are given for this part. Following is a suggested distribution of the points:

5 points: extremely short -- about 15 words or less; communicates almost nothing; several serious errors in sentence structure, vocabulary usage and spelling.

10 points: addresses the topic but does not include most of the major points; constant errors in sentence structure, vocabulary usage, and spelling; organization and coherence are both lacking.

15 points: addresses the topic but contains insufficient information about the major points; frequent errors in sentence structure, vocabulary usage, spelling and punctuation.

20 points: addresses the topic and main points satisfactorily but not adequately; displays inconsistent facility in the use of syntax, vocabulary and punctuation; organization and coherence are satisfactory.

25 points: addresses the topic and major points adequately but not effectively; displays adequate but sometimes inconsistent facility with syntax, usage, spelling and punctuation; adequately organized and developed.

30 points: addresses the topic and major points satisfactorily and adequately but presents some points more effectively than others; displays flexible and appropriate use of syntax and vocabulary; spelling and punctuation errors are not distracting; generally organized and developed.

35 points: addresses the topic and major points effectively; displays consistent control of syntax, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation; well organized and well developed.

Note 1: It is highly recommended that the Writing section be evaluated by two trained graders. The average of the two scores will constitute the examinee's final score on this test.

Note 2: The suggested scoring scale for the Writing section is partially based on 1990-91 "Michigan English Language Assembly Battery Composition Global proficiency Description" and the "Test of Written English Scoring Guide" which was revised 2/90.

C. Scoring Table

The following scoring table is designed **temporarily** for schools where the results obtained from the test will be used for placing students in the appropriate level of Arabic instruction.

	LISTENING	READING	WRITING	TOTAL
PART ONE	15	15	12.5	42.5
PART TWO	20	20	20	60
PART THREE	15	15	17.5	47.5
TOTAL	**50**	**50**	**50**	**150**
				MAXIMUM

The total number of earned points for each part is obtained by adding horizontally the points earned in each of the three skills of listening, reading, and writing. This total should be recorded in the extreme right block, labeled "TOTAL". Similarly, the total number of earned points for each skill is obtained by adding vertically the points earned in each of the three parts (levels) for that skill. This total should all be recorded in the bottom line labeled "TOTAL". The overall total of earned points is obtained by adding horizontally the sub-totals for the three parts. This overall total should then be recorded in the lowest, extreme right block on the scoring table.

Now that all the earned points are totalled and recorded, it is possible to evaluate the general proficiency of the examinee in listening, reading, and writing in the form of percentages. A percentage score is simply:

$$100 \times \frac{\text{earned points}}{\text{maximum points}}$$

For example, the percentage score of a student whose total earned points on listening, reading, and writing is 90 is:

$$100 \times \frac{90}{50} = 60$$

Norms of proficiency for the three parts of the test will be determined after detailed statistical analysis is done on about 100 examinees' answer sheets, and background information questionnaires. The results obtained from this analysis will be the basis for establishing definite norms for novice, intermediate, advanced, and superior levels of proficiency.

Until national norms are established, examiners who want to use APT in order to place new students in their Arabic programs or to measure the progress of their students at the end of an intensive course of Arabic study, may benefit from the following table based on the "opinion" of those who have designed APT.

Percentage Scores	Suggested Academic Level	ACTFL/ETS Scale
20's	Low Elementary	NH
30's	High Elementary	IL
40's	Low Intermediate	IM
50's	High Intermediate	IH
60's	Low Advanced	A
70's	High Advanced	A+
80's and above	Superior	S

Please note that the percentage scores and the academic levels or ACTFL/ETS scale included in this table are mere suggestions at this stage of testing.

APT SCORING TABLE

	LISTENING	READING	WRITING	TOTAL
PART ONE				
PART TWO				
PART THREE				
TOTAL				MAXIMUM

D. Creation of Norms of Proficiency

The two final forms of the Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension tests have already been sent to Dr. Charles Stansfield and his staff at the Center for Applied Linguistics (consultants on the test project) for the purpose of conducting norming administration and establishing national norms of proficiency. They will send invitations to a large sample of universities and high schools teaching Arabic to participate in the norming administration. Participation would be without charge and participants would receive a score report that would indicate the number and percent of questions answered correctly. In addition to mailing test booklets, they will develop special instructions for the norming administration of the test. They will also enclose a postage paid envelope for returning the answer sheets and the test booklets. Each test booklet will be logged in, in order to verify that all have been returned.

Following their return, the answer sheets will be analyzed statistically using the one parameter Rasch model of item response theory. The analysis will permit CAL to establish the statistical characteristics of each item, in a way that is independent of the ability level of the examinee. That is, the item would be placed on the scale that is used to report the score.

Once the scale is established, each examinee's score on the test will be calculated. The score will depend on which items the examinee answers correctly, not merely on the number of correct answers. Scaled scores for each group will then be used to create a table of national norms for each group. Thus, we would anticipate separate tables of norms for students who have completed one, two, and three or more years of college Arabic, as well as separate tables for students who have completed two, three, and four years of high school Arabic. In other words, there would be six tables of norms, one for each group.

Following the development of the tables of norms and the deletion of a few misfitting items, the final versions of the test would be printed. These would be the versions that would be used from that point on in the operational testing program. CAL would then print 300 copies of the APT test booklets. They would also print the examinee handbook (1,000 copies), which would contain the tables of norms and the test manual (700 copies), which would provide technical information on the test, and tables including norms of levels of proficiency.

E. Ordering the Test

Information about the test or test materials can be obtained through writing to:

Dr. Raji M. Rammuny
Dept. of Near Eastern Studies
The University of Michigan
3078 Frieze Building
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

OR

Dr. Charles Stansfield
Center for Applied Linguistics
1118 22nd Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037